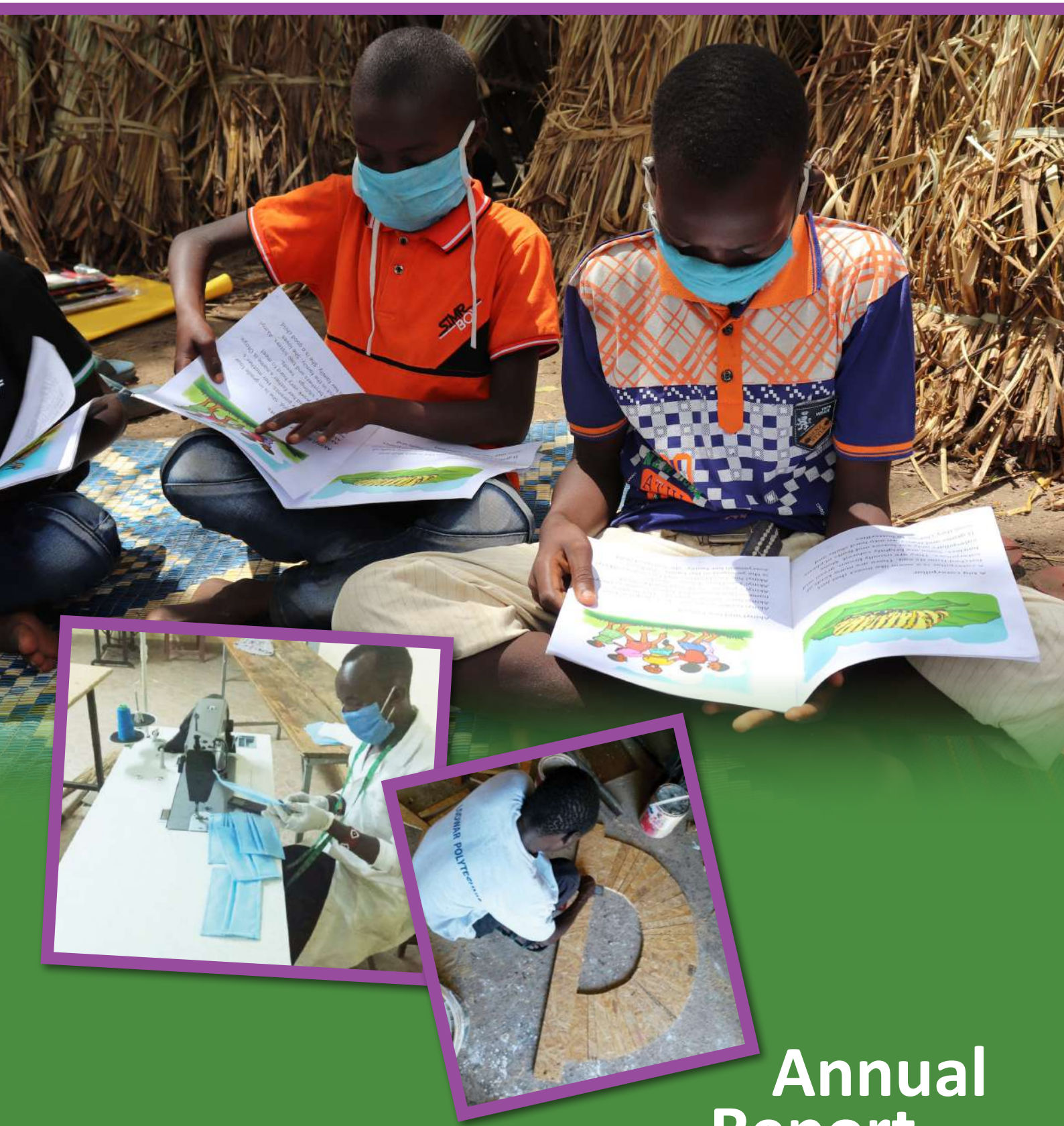
Zizi Afrique
Foundation



Annual Report 2020

Zizi Afrique Foundation

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

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MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ALP	Accelerated Learning Program
ALiVE	Assessment of Life Skills and Values in East Africa
CITC	Christian Industrial Training College
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease of 2019
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
KICD	Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development
LGIHE	Luigi Giussani Institute of Higher Education
MZF	Milele Zanzibar Foundation
OAA	Optimizing Assessments for All
RELI	Regional Education Learning Initiative
SEL	Social Emotional Learning
SFS	Safaricom Foundation Scholarships
TAs	Teacher Assistants
TTI	The Toolkit iSkills
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
VaLi	Values and Life Skills
VTC	Vocational Training Centre
WYD	Whole Youth Development

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Dr. Kahaki Kimani
Board Chair

Message from the Chairperson

The future is still visible

On behalf of the Board, I wish to applaud the Zizi Afrique team for the achievements of 2020. When COVID-19 struck, and we made that painful decision to close the office, it was unclear on where we were headed, and whether we would achieve anything at all. What we present to you in this report is the result of tireless agility and determination to make an impact. While the management team have their story on how success was achieved in such adversity, we have our story as board members.

Like Lant Pritchett advices, our focus as the board has been creation of a fostering environment where change is possible. We have learnt however that the easier part of change is what you expect others to achieve, the more difficult bit is what you must achieve yourself. I will live to remember our first board meeting held on 4th of April 2020. I spent a big part of it worrying about the buttons to press, and managing the rising anxiety with fears of dropping off, and the unbearable noises converging from all ends. Despite the difficulties experienced in this meeting, it remains a celebrated genesis of efficiency in running business, and leveraging on technology to make the impossible possible.

Above all, we celebrate the Zizi Afrique Strategy 2021-24. This is a climax of a long thinking journey that started back in 2019. Our vision of a world in which all children and youth learn and thrive flows deep from our hearts. We are restless about children who attend school without learning; we are disturbed by youth who, even after more than 15 years of schooling and training, have not accumulated the holistic capabilities demanded by work and life. We understand that achieving this is the role of government, but also acknowledge that such complex problems, such as social justice aspects, must be everyone's business.

From touching the wrong buttons and freaking at it, the year 2020 ended on a high note. As a board, we successfully completed the training on finance-for-non-finance, finalized and shared the strategy with our key partners, and posted tremendous results. Despite the unprecedented disruptions caused by COVID-19, we are thankful for all that we have learnt as Zizi Afrique, and all that we hope to achieve in 2021 and beyond.

We thank all our partners, funders and benefactors, for the trust you have in us. We promise to always do you proud through our commitment to change in society. We thank our partners in government, civil society and the private sector, for this journey requires such support as yours. We thank the children and youth that we work with, from Turkana to Tana River, for you give us the reason and motivation to wake up every day. To all of you, we present this 2020 report as a gift, we hope you will enjoy reading it, and together, we achieve the dream of unlocking potentials for every child.

> **WE CELEBRATE THE ZIZI AFRIQUE STRATEGY 2021-24.** This is a climax of a long thinking journey that started back in 2019. Our vision of a world in which all children and youth learn and thrive flows deep from our hearts.

Board Members

Dr. Kahaki Kimani
Board Chair

Dr. John Mugo
Board Secretary

Prof. Daniel Sifuna
Board Member

Purity Mbabu
Board Member

Benjamin Ondego
Board Member

Dr. Sara Ruto
Board Member

Michael Nzule
Board Member

About Zizi Afrique Foundation

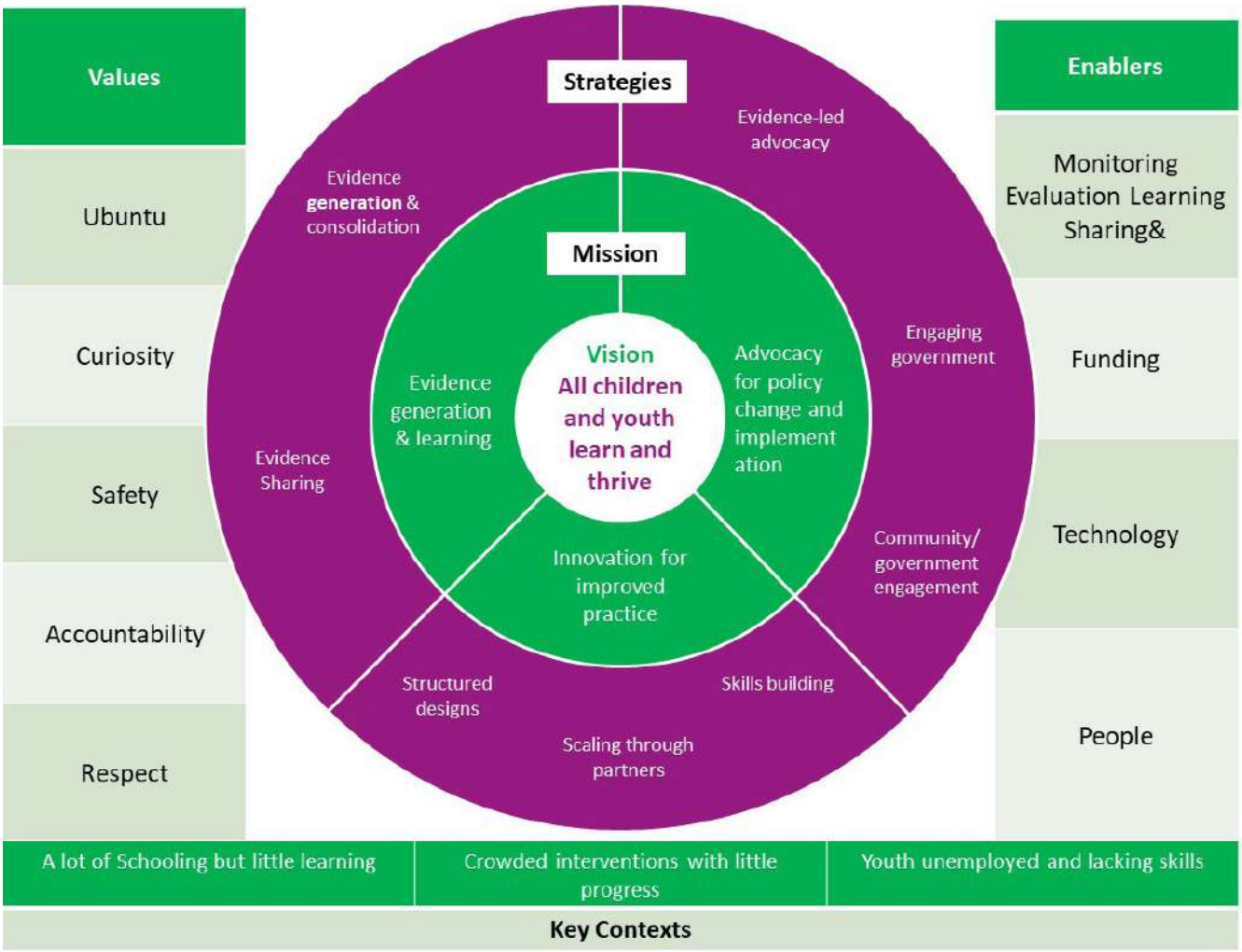
Vision

A world where all children and youth learn and thrive.

Mission

We consolidate evidence and innovate solutions to shape policy and practice, to equip all children and youth with competences for learning, living and working.

Theory of Change



Our Team

JOHN MUGO
Executive Director

PURITY NGINA
Research and Assessment Manager

JOYCE KINYANJUI
Senior Advisor - Foundation Projects

VIRGINIA NGINDIRU
Program Manager - Accelerated Learning

RENALDAH MBOJE
Program Manager - TVET

EZEKIEL SIKUTWA
Finance and Admin Manager

DAVID WERE
Senior Accountant

SYLVIA NJAAGA
RELI Hub Coordinator

IRENE CHEPNG'ETICH
Programme Officer

FRANCIS NJUGUNA
Programme Officer

WALTER ODONDI
Programme Officer

SPINGS AKUMAH
Financial Accountant

ELI OSANGO
Programme Accountant

BERIA WAWIRA
Procurement Officer

FAITH MUKIRIA
Programme Officer - MELS

JOB MWANGI
Communications Officer

DAVID ALELAH OTIENO
Programme Officer

DAVID ROBA
Programme Officer

JAMES MBURU
Programme Assistant

KAREN ARISA
Programme Assistant

VIRGINIA WANGARI
Executive Assistant to the Executive Director

AGNES FURO
Administrative Assistant

Zizi Afrique in 2020: Walking the uncharted path

By John Mugo

The year 2020 has gone down in history as the toughest year our generation has faced, following the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
At Zizi Afrique, the staff members will remember the year for many things:

On Friday 13th March 2020, we were all in the swimming pool at Olkaria, enjoying a day-out for staff bonding. Someone shouted: 'The first case of COVID-19 has been confirmed in Kenya', we swiftly bid the steaming waters goodbye, and drove back to Nairobi. Hardly did we know, how this would turn our life around. Following the announcement of school closures, and other safety measures by the President, we closed down the office on Tuesday 17th March, and had to figure out how to keep business running.

Team members posing for a photo at the Rift Valley view point

Team members posing for a photo at the Geothermal Spa

We celebrate the agility demonstrated by our team, and the resilience that the organization rapidly built. Despite COVID-19, Zizi Afrique posted a performance of 77 percent at the close of the year, compared to 85 percent in 2019.

Looking back, we are proud of 10 things that we achieved in the year 2020.

Adopting technology to run business 100% online

Over the COVID-19 period, Zizi Afrique adopted new technologies for online meetings, document signing and timesheets for output management. Besides the digital platforms, working from home was supported through a work-from-home policy, and amendment of the finance policy to include monthly internet facilitation. In addition, staff members were supported to attend various online training courses, including data analysis courses, and a creative writing master course with Biko Zulu to stimulate written communication. A total of 11 blogs and articles were published, and 7 papers presented at various conferences and meetings.

Maintaining staff welfare amidst COVID-19

Following office closure, Zizi Afrique partnered with professional counsellors and initiated regular staff follow-up sessions. Online staff meetings checked on how staff were coping with anxiety, interspersed with occasional staff welfare surveys, and provided support whenever this was needed. Following lifting up of the lockdown, visits were conducted to staff members who lost their loved ones or were unwell. To close the year, fruit baskets and well-wish cards were sent to staff who had fallen victim to the pandemic, with well-wish messages from all staff members.

Moving research online

One core strategy of Zizi Afrique is evidence generation. To ensure continuity, the organization experimented with various tools to conduct online surveys, including GoogleForms and the open-sourced Kobo Toolbox among others. The organization also tried out blended surveys, combining online and in-person surveys to ameliorate research exclusion of families, youth and children with no access to technology. In total, 7 surveys were conducted in 2020, applying these varied tools and approaches.

Mobilizing parents through the KawaidaMpya campaign

Unusually, COVID-19 sent both children and parents home, and the learning opportunity shifted from school to home. Zizi Afrique reached out to like-minded organizations, and initiated the #KawaidaMpya (NewNormal) online campaign. The campaign shared information with parents, with practical tips on how to learn with children. The campaign involved around 20 state and non-state partner organizations and ran from May to December 2020, reaching 113,285 people through Twitter and 199,551 people through Facebook. One particular post on creating a routine with children had 33,835 likes.

Moving learning to the community

With schools closing, the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) working with 119 primary schools came to a hard stop. Consultation among the program teams in Bungoma, Turkana and Tana River counties allowed the rapid adaptation to innovate a community learning camp model. Learning was conducted by teacher assistants in community facilities, in church halls, open spaces and under trees. A total of 4,528 children were reached through this unique learning model that sustained learning of children left behind through the entire COVID-19 closure.

Combining low- and high-tech to sustain foundational learning

Experience revealed that face-face learning sessions could not serve the required speed and scale. To reach more children, Zizi Afrique distributed 1,660 solar-powered radios to extremely-deserving families, and worked with two community radio stations in Turkana and Tana River counties to deliver lessons to children. Partnering with the PAL Network, the organization also experimented with SMS learning to reach families with simple phones. A partnership between Samsung and Safaricom Foundations, and the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) moved learning to high-tech. A total of 250 state-of-the-art tablets were loaded with curriculum materials and released for community use to support learning in Bungoma.

Learners attentively following a radio learning session aired by Radio Amani in Tana Delta

Facilitating youth with technology to learn online

When COVID-19 struck, a total of 350 youth facing extreme adversities had just been awarded scholarships to train at artisan level in 12 training centres nationally. Through partnership with Safaricom Foundation and The Toolkit iSkills, the youth were first enrolled on WhatsApp platforms to keep the conversations going, but this left out more than half of the youth. The partnership team responded by distributing 160 smartphones and whitelisting the Jielimishe learning platform. Youth Consultants were engaged to sustain conversations and support the on-boarding of youth in remote places, especially those in Mandera, Marsabit, Isiolo and West Pokot counties. Through this well-coordinated approach, a total of 222 youth enrolled onto the platform, and completed a total of 7,950 online lessons in life and employability skills.

Providing leadership to the education sector

Zizi Afrique occupied a unique space of sectoral leadership over the COVID-19 period. In the TVET Sub-sector, a request by the Technical Working Group culminated into the development of a strategy for response and recovery, which identified seven intervention strategies. Still, the organization convened the TVET-Values and Life Skill working Group to conduct a few collaborative interventions, among them the online youth mentorship (which reached nearly 3,000 youth through weekly online hangouts), and training of instructors of vocational training in digital skills. Support was given to the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops to conduct an online conference of the Catholic TVET Network, bringing together around 100 vocational training centres. As the Kenya Hub for the Regional Education Learning Initiative (RELI), Zizi Afrique coordinated over 20 civil society organizations to complete various interventions.

Expansion amidst difficulty

Uniquely, Zizi Afrique expanded programmatically over the COVID-19 closure. The Assessment of Life Skills and Values in East Africa (ALiVE) kicked off in August 2020, with an initial funding of USD 2.4 million from three foundations. Through the Values and Life Skills cluster of RELI, this project extended Zizi's influence to Tanzania and Uganda, co-leading with Milele Zanzibar Foundation and the Luigi Giussani Institute of Higher Education. The organization's budget grew by 23 percent, while the staff count increased by 38 percent from 13 in December 2019 to 18 by December 2020. This has brought stability, and set the organization on a new performance and impact trajectory.

Finalizing first strategy

In December 2020, the Zizi Afrique board approved the first Organizational Strategy, which will guide the organization from January 2021 to December 2024. The vision and mission of the new strategy brings to centrality the acquisition of competences for learning, living and working, through three core pathways: generation and translation of evidence; collaboration and engagement for advocacy; and innovations for improved practice. The implementation of this strategy gives form to the organization, and injects energy to break the project/program silos to nurture a unitary organization with one clear vision and mission.

Our 2020 Timeline

30th March
First Staff online meeting

29th March/14th May
Acquired new tools for online work

17th March
Office closes

6th April
Commencement of KawaidaMpya campaign

April
Survey on remote learning

24th April
Online admission meeting for TVET scholarships

9th May
First Online Youth Hangout

8th June
Distribution of solar-powered radios

13th May
Formation of WhatsApp groups with youth

3rd May
First online survey- TVET

9th July
Distribution of phones to youth

1st August
Kick-off of ALiVE initiative

10th August
Commenced training of 100 instructors

5th October
Start of Community Learning Camps

8th September
Governance training on Finance

24th August
Commenced online training on life skills (TTI)

20th November
Bungoma Launch of high-tech tools

14th December
Last online meeting to finalize strategy

18th December
End of year online party

Lessons from Enabling the Youth

Whatever happens – Keep Moving

By Renaldah Mjomba

Who would have imagined that the announcement by the president about a national lockdown would completely disrupt life as we always knew it? Who would have thought that schools could close for almost one year, making people realize that schools and teachers were more than mere spaces for passing on knowledge, but determinants of equilibrium for many households? Who would have thought that one year down the line, we would be back to discussing the COVID-19 Pandemic anew, as if it has only began following the third vicious wave of the pandemic in Kenya?!

At Zizi Afrique, the Ujana360 team was not left behind. The Pandemic could not have come at a busier time for the programme – when external evaluation of Phase 1 (2017-19) of the program had just commenced and the Safaricom Foundation Scholarship (SFS) just about to take off.

Ujana360 roots for embedding of Whole Youth Development (WYD) in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), through evidence generation and sharing, sustaining collaborative advocacy and partnering with training institutions. The SFS program was initiated following evidence that confirmed exclusion of certain cadres of youth, and the potential of WYD in facilitating success in work and life. A partnership between Safaricom Foundation, Zizi Afrique and The Toolkit iSkills, SFS is offering one-year scholarships to 900 vulnerable youth to train in Plumbing, Welding, Electrical installation, and Food & Beverage.

Starting a new program on the onset of a pandemic

When the life-changing announcement on 13th March was made, the 13 training partner-institutions had just been selected and the managers inducted, but not a single trainee had been picked. Swiftly, the organization moved to put up county teams and committees to select the trainees with minimal on-ground involvement. Young people residing in 11 counties were identified to team up with local administrators to identify the most deserving youth within their localities. This set the ball rolling, the information about SFS was passed by word of mouth from house to house and from one friend to another. Within two months, the trainees had been identified, interviewed, recruited and enrolled into the institutions! Out of the 500 shortlisted applicants, 350 were awarded the scholarship, among them 16 with disabilities.

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500 SHORTLISTED
applicants, 350 were awarded the scholarship, among them 16 with disabilities.

The next "headache" was that of ensuring the awardees would still be available when the institutions reopen in the indefinable future. Swiftly the organization moved to propose that some part of training, namely "Digital skills, Communication and Employability skills" should be conducted via digital platforms using smartphones. Unknown to the organization, we had just led ourselves to the other "headache": about half of the trainees did not have phones! Oh, how for granted we take access to communication and being on countless WhatsApp groups and checking our emails from our phones! To the really needy, that is an inaccessible luxury! Talk of encountering the digital divide face-face.

Fortunately, Safaricom availed 160 smartphones, followed by supply of internet bundles, and accompanied by whitelisting of the online training platform. The online lessons began amid questions of "how do I switch on my phone?" "How do I load bundles?" "I don't have an email address", and so on. Some youth in Mandera had crossed the border with their animals, and could not be traced. WhatsApp groups were formed to bring all the youth together, and provide real-time support and on-boarding. And TTI successfully kicked off the training, reaching up to 60 percent of the trainees by the 3rd month.

The Birth of online youth mentorship

At the same time, the Values and Life skills (VaLi) Working Group was busy conducting meetings and innovating. Established in 2017, VaLi is an initiative of around 40 Civil Society actors working to integrate core capabilities in TVET. When COVID-19 struck, VaLi formed the *Husika* (get involved) initiative, beginning with an online survey to open conversation with the youth and TVET trainers. Encouragingly, majority of the youth indicated they would like to be "mentored" in various areas as well as training on subjects that they were not taught in school. The results of that survey had just penned the second programme for the ujana360 programme during the pandemic period.

By November 2020, the hangouts had engaged more than
2,000 YOUTH,
online and one-on-one.

First, weekly *Youth Hangouts*, basically an online space for youth to engage, kicked off at 3 pm on 9th May with the topic "Self-management and Resilience - Innovation for Self Employment." Six Saturdays later, the Hangouts had now become part and parcel of our weekly activities and the team had become more proficient in planning online events, complete with a real-time evaluation through *Mentimeter.* By November 2020, the hangouts had engaged more than 2,000 youth, online and one-on-one. The initiative took an incremental approach, adopting early sharing of information, improving quality of the speakers, and involving youth in determining the topics of discussion. The topics varied and touched on all facets of life: from *personal, planning Communication*, *entrepreneurship, study opportunities abroad, sexuality* to *office politics*.

About 20 sessions later, towards the end of September, space was opened for Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) to also organize the Hangouts. On 25th September, Ujima Foundation delivered the first collaborative HangOut on *Self Awareness.* This was followed by sessions hosted by Kibondeni College, Rarieda Training Centre, CITC-Thika among others. This collaboration unmasked the digital incapacity of many instructors in the VTCs, and the need to equip instructors with the digital skills needed to reach their own students remotely.

That realization opened the doors to our third big online activity: the online training of about 100 VTC Instructors and 30 Mentors. The Youth Mentors training was an intensive 5-week course, with 2-hour lessons twice a week. Only 12 of the 25 made it to the end. The Instructors' course was an equally intensive 2 weeks, 9am-5pm course, and 98 instructors touched the finish line.

What a year, what a journey! Our biggest lesson – whatever happens, Keep Moving.

'Online training amidst COVID-19 has been a new kind of class. I am glad that technology has a way of bringing things together. I am privileged to have a phone that is able to translate what is on the screen to audio as I have vision impairment. I have also learned to use my phone as a tool for writing and reading. I am glad that Safaricom Foundation has also provided us with internet bundles that ensure connectivity throughout the sessions.' Faith Kilonzo, student at Waithaka VTC.

> "Online training amidst COVID-19 has been a new kind of class. I am glad that technology has a way of bringing things together. I am privileged to have a phone that is able to translate what is on the screen to audio as I have vision impairment."

Members from Safaricom and Zizi Afrique Foundations and The Toolkit Iskills after a workplan development workshop in Waithaka VTC

Celebrating continued learning in Turkana, Bungoma and Tana River Counties – Despite COVID-19

By Virginia Ngindiru

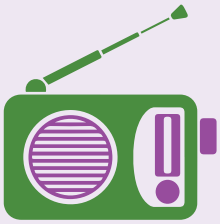
Though unprecedented, the COVID-19 closures presented an opportunity for Zizi Afrique to adjust the implementation of the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP). Before this, over 7,000 learners[1] were enrolled in the school-based camps. The nation-wide school closures in Mid-March however meant further loss of learning opportunity, increasing the possibility of learners falling further behind.

An emergency Program meeting was held early in April 2020, and generated a four-pronged response strategy:

Identification, Enabling, Engaging and Equalizing. We commissioned a survey in Bungoma, Turkana and Tana River counties in April to determine whether the learners were aware of and/or participating in remote learning, popularized as the immediate COVID-19 response by the Ministry of Education to ensure continued learning. From the survey, only 36 percent of the total households surveyed reported having continued with some form of learning, 21 percent of these through radio. Reasons for this included low device ownership- only 20 percent of households owned a radio and low awareness about ongoing programs (only 48%). Turkana had the lowest levels of awareness (only 20%). It was therefore evident that learning opportunities had not reached most of the children in these counties.

It was also evident that hunger affected learning. In Turkana, 82 percent of households reported surviving on only one meal a day. Learners from female-headed households faced greater challenges – they had the lowest device ownership, recorded low awareness levels about ongoing programs, were less likely to have a literate adult at home and were more prone to hunger (Zizi Afrique, 2020).

In Turkana,
82% OF HOUSEHOLDS
reported surviving on only one meal a day



1660 solar power radios
17 hours of radio programs
4,528 CHILDREN
in community camps

The challenges notwithstanding, these children, like many others countrywide needed support and in response, we responded with two innovations:

Rolled out a community-Based Intervention. Teacher assistants (TAs) reached 4,500 households through the rapid survey. We developed a levelled workbook with literacy and numeracy exercises, and printed and distributed 6,400 levelled storybooks from open source sites. The TAs conducted home visits, assisting learners on the workbook tasks and guiding them to come up with value-based daily routines. Parents responded through organizing their learners in small groups in their compounds, church halls and mosques. A rapid assessment of 9,699 conducted in August/September established that only 57 percent of learners assessed could read at least a paragraph. In response, we launched structured community-based camps in October, where learners met for 3 hours daily, for 10 consecutive days. Assessments conducted after this indicated that 25 percent of learners moved by at least one level every 10 learning days.

Use of low-tech mediums to deliver learning. To facilitate access to devices, we purchased and distributed 1,660 solar-powered radios to most vulnerable households in Turkana and Tana River counties. Female-headed households were prioritized. Together with our partners, we aired 17 hours of radio programs on a weekly basis. Under the premise, '*a little learning, a little fun*', learners engaged in level-based activities and showcased their talents live on air. This was complemented by SMS content sent out weekly, and based on the learning levels of individual children.

[1] In January 2020, over 7,000 learners were enrolled in the ALP in 119 schools (literacy and numeracy camps) across the 3 counties.

Learners in an ALP school in Turkana county reading aloud during a lesson

Four lessons

Community agency increased. Over the 9-month period, we witnessed communities self-organizing and stepping up their support to ensure learning happened. They initiated learning in small groups in the villages which we leveraged and established as structured camps in October. They availed their compounds to become learning spaces and identified social halls for learners to meet in groups. In Tana Delta they purchased mats for children to use during the sessions. We saw local leaders becoming involved in learning- For instance, there was a chief who would receive SMS content and share with learners who assembled daily in his compound. In Galili village,Tana Delta, the parents went beyond. They mobilized financial resources and hired an assistant teacher to support the TA to manage the large number of children who self-enrolled for the sessions.

We were inspired especially by what happened in Bubesa village to mark the International Literacy day:

'*We started the day with a community march around the village. All people at the venue walked with the learners, carrying banners with beautiful messages. After the walk, we settled at the venue. The learners sat with their parents and picked stories of their choice to read. All the learners read a story for their parents. Parents were very happy to listen to their children read for them,'*

Bakari Majawo teacher assistant,
Bubesa primary.

For the
1,865 LEARNERS
who attained the minimum 30 days intervention, 1,013 (54%) could read at least a paragraph. In numeracy, the proportion of learners struggling with complex subtraction reduced from 615 to only 269

After the celebrations at Bubesa, I went to Kinyadu accompanied by the TAs. Upon our arrival at Kinyadu, the whole community came to welcome us while singing and dancing. We joined them and walked around the village while singing to celebrate the day. The learners in Kinyadu were also carrying banners. The TA, Ms Fatuma Kibwana, organized the learners and they prepared different materials like hats made out of paper with "international Literacy day" scribbled on them. After the community march, some learners showcased the activities they usually use in class during the sessions. Two learners also volunteered to read a story each from the story booklet. After the reading session, everyone joined to sing and dance a Pokomo cultural dance known as '*Kithoko*'. To end the day, people came together to enjoy a meal organized and prepared by the parents. (Narrated by Valentine Mzogolo, program officer, Maridhiano)

Learners in Tana Delta during the International Literacy Day march

Increased learning opportunity and improved learning outcomes. Reaching over 6,400 learners and keeping them learning throughout the period is a no mean feat. In fact, it has brought parents closer to the schools and TAs. The Parents now feel more connected to the TAs for the daily support of their learners. In Bungoma, the Sub County Director of Education recently reported that parents prefer to discuss their children's learning with the TAs. For the 1,865 learners who attained the minimum 30 days intervention, 1,013 (54%) could read at least a paragraph. In numeracy, the proportion of learners struggling with complex subtraction reduced from 615 to only 269, more learners progressing to higher levels (multiplication and division).

> I had a girl who was previously enrolled in a private school. She started at syllable level but by the end of the camps, she was at the paragraph level. The mother was so impressed that she transferred her to my school
>
> **Everline**
> TA Bungoma County.

Technology PLUS defined. Before COVID-19, ALP did not have a defined technology component. However, during the period, we engaged with learners and parents through radio and SMS. For the latter, we sent out levelled content weekly and TAs followed up on assigned tasks. Monitoring data showed that as a result of the low-tech options parental involvement in learning stood at 69 percent after our initial phase of the community-based component. This piece did not work in isolation, but was complemented by workbooks, thus technology PLUS. Moving forward, radio and SMS will complement the face-to-face intervention.

During the same period, Samsung donated 250 tablets for use by learners at home. This component was launched in October in Bungoma County. The initiative will see over 1,250 learners participate in community-based learning to promote acquisition of literacy and numeracy competencies. Prior to the launch, KICD loaded the tablets with appropriate content.

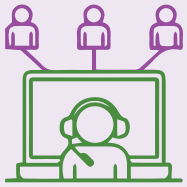
Adversity can breed opportunity. The year 2020 presented us an opportunity to demonstrate that as a program, we can thrive alongside the communities we work with, to promote learning. We connected much more closely with communities and we celebrate our network of partners, from the village to national level, for their unwavering support during the period.

Opportunity in crisis: RELI in 2020

By Agatha Kimani

When we face crises, we learn to appreciate and develop the attitude to align ourselves and float with the tide. This was the case for us, when COVID-19 was confirmed in Kenya and schools closed down in 2020. Through the March 15th Presidential directive, the learning hubs were all turned off as learners and educators retreated and locked themselves up in their homes to steer clear of the virus. No social gatherings or in-person meetings were allowed. The silence around the learning institutions drove a nail through the doom and gloom of the pandemic.

In the meantime, the country convening of the Regional Education Learning Initiative (RELI) was beckoning. The annual activity always took place as an in-person event where the group takes time to reflect and learn from a theme of common interest. Thematic groups and Organizations also got an opportunity to showcase their products. The structure involves plenary and break-out sessions as well as special interest group meetings and quick-fire sessions from where specific issues are deliberated.



Our anxieties were rising - In the prevailing circumstances, it was clear that an in-person approach was not feasible. This left us with only two options:

AN ONLINE APPROACH OR NO CONVENING AT ALL

Our anxieties were rising- In the prevailing circumstances, it was clear that an in-person approach was not feasible. This left us with only two options: An online approach or no convening at all. Further exploration of the former catapulted our concerns: To what extent can an online approach help achieve the desired outcome? How can RELI successfully host an online annual convening of 25 Organizations, and more than 100 people? Being a member-driven initiative, ownership is critical- How do we get members to own the process?

Group Learning in Turkana County

Although online meetings communicate effectively, they take away the human interaction that comes with in-person meetings. How do we address this? How about the challenges which come with technology- loss of internet connection; gadget failure; lack of electricity, and the RELI members who would connect from remote places like Marsabit and Trans Mara? How would one keep the audience engaged and sustain interest over the 3 days?

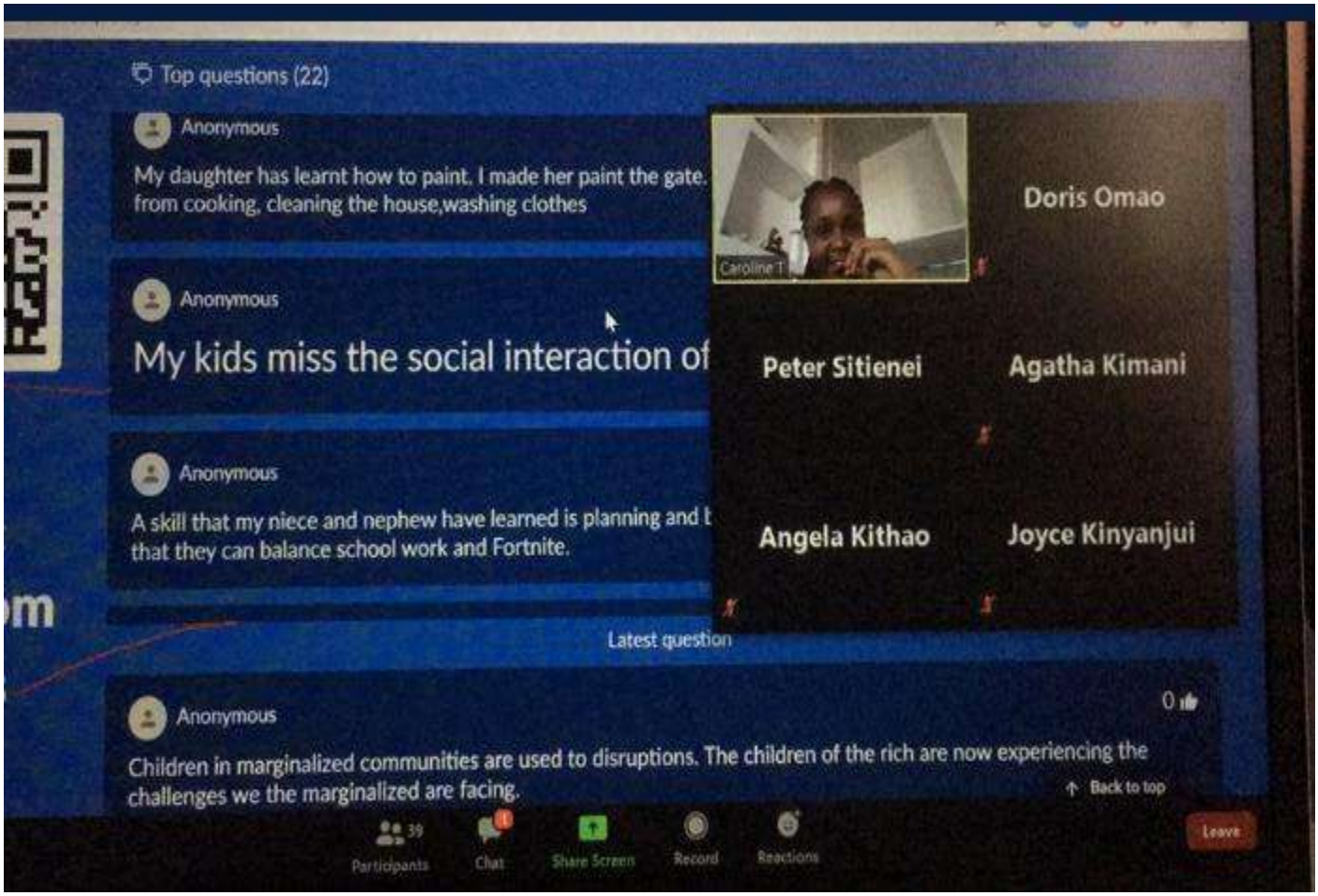
Navigating a first online conference

Unless we could crack these, we were sure to end up with a large number logging in but only a small percentage of the participants actually attending the convening, and even fewer engaging actively. In the crisis, we were determined to incubate solutions.

The RELI leadership firmly steered the process. Based on the exploration we had undertaken, it emerged that the process was more critical than the product and only thorough planning would help us get there. Two months prior to the event, a 2-hour country planning meeting was held. The meeting achieved consensus on the general structure including the relevant areas of discussion and a list of potential facilitators. Having made the decision to experiment with a virtual approach, members mandated the leadership to spearhead the activity.

A concept outlining the convening objectives, the general structure and expected outcomes was developed at the onset. We engaged the participation of our communication experts, Well Made Strategy (WMS) in planning. Through a training session, we unpacked and addressed our anxieties. Armed with a list of 'Dos' and 'Don'ts' of an online approach, we went for the bull by its horns.

To ensure a more inclusive approach, session chairs and moderators were identified from the membership, inducted and charged with preparation of their sessions. Pairing a chair and a moderator assured co-support for the session which was highly re-assuring.



First day of the RELI country convening

Three sessions – Three days

The program would deviate from the norm: instead of three full days, there would be three, 3-hour sessions staggered across diverse dates so as to allow adequate time to synthesize emerging lessons and plough them back for improvement of the upcoming sessions. Presentations were shared with the host prior to the event for back-up. In the back-end, a host of technical staff were charged with diverse responsibilities: technological support and troubleshooting; participant registration; time-keeping; and synthesis of issues on the chat and feeding to the moderator.

The first session shared the whole RELI plan with the members and set the mood for a new RELI year, starting July 1st 2020. Country Leads presented the overall picture; thematic Leads presented their specific components, while RELI-Kenya Hub, Zizi Afrique Foundation, did her support components.

Session two focused on the innovations created by members during the COVID-19 school closure, and the emerging opportunities for joint participation. Each innovation was packaged through short descriptions to enable participants draw links to their work. Through breakout sessions of small interest groups, members engaged in deep exploration of the opportunities for their work.

The final Session focused on School re-opening, to determine the contribution members could make. Being the current debate, the conversation delved into receiving back learners and teachers and improving safety and readiness to resume learning, as well as supporting schools recover from the impact of closure, and the accompanying health, social and economic impact.

The outcome blew us off our feet, and revealed the silver lining at the end of a dark cloud. Participants celebrated having pulled off a very successful maiden virtual event. Many hailed the approach for the convenience of attending from diverse locations, while the convening costs were cut down 100-fold.

“We sum it up by saying John F. Kennedy knew this experience better. In his words, the Chinese use two brush strokes to write the word ‘Crisis’. One brush stroke stands for danger; the other for opportunity”

The success of this convening raised the bar and sparked many more outputs. Through collaborative online events, members synthesized evidence and developed a memorandum to the School re-opening committee set up by the Government. In addition, Values and Life Skills thematic group pulled off the ambitious project – Assessment of Life Skills and Values in East Africa (ALiVE). The Learner-centred Teaching thematic cluster developed a package of home learning resources and mounted interactive murals at community level to support learning at home. The Equity and Inclusion cluster engaged with partners to track progress of educational policies in Parliament.

We sum it up by saying John F. Kennedy knew this experience better. In his words, the Chinese use two brush strokes to write the word ‘Crisis’. One brush stroke stands for danger; the other for opportunity. Indeed, RELI understood the crisis, but recognized and seized the opportunity.

Amidst COVID-19 - ALiVE becomes alive

By Purity Ngina

In 2018, a group of 20 organizations under the umbrella of the Regional Education Learning Initiative (RELI) conceived the idea of assessing 21st century skills. A meeting of the Values and Life Skills (VaLi) thematic cluster of RELI held in Dar es Salaam (June 2018), reviewed various assessment tools, and concluded that most of the available assessments were poorly adapted to East Africa's context. What followed was more than a year of consultation, until the Assessment of Life Skills and Values in East Africa (ALiVE) was conceived. The maturity of this idea coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, a crisis that clouded the leadership team with extreme anxiety and doubt. The team however remained hopeful and navigated uncertainty with persistence. Before the pandemic, it was hard to imagine how a regional project such as this would be successful with all meetings conducted virtually.

The ALiVE project commenced officially on the 1st of August, 2020, to great excitement. A leadership structure had been agreed upon. Zizi Afrique taking overall leadership and also leading the assessment in Kenya; Milele Zanzibar Foundation (MZF) taking leadership in Tanzania, and the Luigi Giussani Institute of Higher Education (LGIHE) leading the assessment in Uganda. Various members of VaLi participating actively and holding varied responsibilities. By the close of the year, 5 key milestones were achieved: Theory of change clarified beaming light to the initiative; Consensus reached on the competences to assess; 3 Learnshops held; Literature Review process kicked off, and contextualization field study completed.

Shy girls covering their faces during the contextualization study in Kenya

ALiVE team conducting interviews with parents at Tana River County'

Theory of change

ALiVE envisions an East Africa in which every learner is equipped with the critical competences needed for learning and thriving in life and at work. This vision is to be pursued through a framework of three pathways: contextualized assessments, evidence-led advocacy and learning. These three broad objectives are mirrored against RELI's three pillars: Knowledge hub, transformed member organizations and policy influence. For three years (2020-2023), ALiVE aims at developing contextualized tools for the assessment of life skills and values in the East African context (with the final products being open-source), generate large-scale evidence on life skills and values across the three countries and use the evidence to:

- Inform change and build capacities within the VaLi-ALiVE member organizations
- Influence the three national education systems to focus on and produce these competencies
- Inform regional policy through the East Africa Community
- Inform global thinking, especially in regard to the inclusion of and measurement of life skills and values as 'relevant and effective' learning outcomes

Validation of competences: What skills will ALiVE Target?

After the official inauguration of the project, there was one item that needed consensus-what skills the project was to target. The ALiVE leaders invited the VaLi regional members to a validation meeting on the 17th of September 2020. Over 45 members drawn from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania attended the meeting. During this meeting, 4 competencies were validated. These are problem-solving, collaboration, self-awareness and respect. Further to this, the VaLi members felt the need to also assess the basic foundational competences. It was unanimously agreed that there was no need to re-invent the wheel, the Uwezo assessment tools would be applied.

Learning Sessions

The main pride of the ALiVE project will be a successful robust regional learning community, measured by its ability to nurture a sense of common purpose, connect a critical mass of local actors, and produce and share the knowledge to inform and influence change. In its endeavor to achieve this, ALiVE leaders agreed to host learning sessions-Or what we know them as a learnshop; A place to shop knowledge.

The first Learnshop revolved around the main inspiration of ALiVE-Lack of contextualized assessment tools. Prof. Monica Fontana Abad from LGIHE, Aubryn Allyn Sidle and Dr Brenda Oulo from AMPLIFY facilitated this session which was attended by 38 East Africans. The inaugural session was on the contextualization process as well as the validation process. The questions and feedback from this session brought more clarity on the contextualization process but also exposed the lack of coordination that currently exists in the field of Social Emotional Learning (SEL). Many attendees felt they could not differentiate between SEL, Values and Life skills, soft skills, transferable skills as well as 21st-century skills but more so on what frameworks exist globally.

To address these, the ALiVE leaders organized a second session and invited Bryan Nelson and Sonya Temko from the Taxonomy project to facilitate a session on "Explore SEL: Understanding, Contextualizing, and Assessing Competencies". 45 members in attendance had a rare opportunity to understand the taxonomy project from the coding process to the most practical part of navigating the EASEL website. Having tackled two complex questions on contextualization and existing frameworks on SEL the community had one other major question on how to create activity-based assessment items. Prof. Esther Care from the Optimizing Assessment of All (OAA) project conducted in Zambia, Gambia, and DRC Congo was invited to share her past experiences as an expert in assessment as well as from the OAA project. This session was very enlightening since it opened the team to the complexity of not only creating activity-based assessments and the wide age group (13-17years) but also that of household assessment.

In particular, when Prof. Care was confronted by Mauro Giacomazzi with a question on the complexity of household assessment as compared to school-based assessment she admitted that it is complex but doable and that there is no right or wrong approach. She advised that we should not try to assess every part of the skills but just focus on what is humanly possible-This is now our principle.

Literature review

The process kicked off in October 2020 with Prof. Monica Fontana from Uganda developing the literature review protocol. The protocol was shared with the ALiVE leadership team for review and two meetings were held before the adoption. The literature review process was meant to be a collaborative process from searching for papers, analyzing to reporting. However, to save on time, it was agreed that each country would focus on one skill; Kenya-problem solving, Uganda-collaboration,

Excited youths perusing story books gifted after contextualization interviews

> The ALiVE leaders and VaLi team worked hard and collaboratively and by end of the exercise, 368 interviews and 53 focus group discussions in 15 districts were conducted in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. What a milestone for uncertainty to achievement!

and Tanzania-Self-awareness. Around 10 members of VaLi and ALiVE had the opportunity of being mentored by Prof. Monica Fontana and Mauro Giacomazzi on how to conduct a scientific literature review and on how to conduct searches on the most credited databases for educational research as well as the use of Mendeley for referencing and filing all documents collected from the scientific literature while ordering their reference details.

During the literature review process, the team encountered various challenges including how to identify the relationship of studies in the context of its contribution to the topic and other studies, combining and synthesizing information, and how to assess studies for eligibility. We were able to thrive with several lessons learnt for instance the fact that in a review of the literature, different opinions on the use of concepts, procedures and interpretation in the content analysis are important. We also realized that there are similarities in the way the researchers explain the process: either they do it by using different distinguishing stages, or in running text. Lastly, we learnt that the exclusion of grey literature and failure to test for evidence of publication bias can result in incorrect or misleading conclusions.

But how does one conduct a contextualization study during COVID-19?

ALiVE was inspired by the fact that there are many assessment tools on life skills and values but not for East Africans. They are mainly from the West and the Global North. Cognizant of this, the leaders committed to carrying out a contextualization study where interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect data from adolescents between the age of 13-17 years, their parents and key informants who are people that interact with the adolescents in their line of duty such as nurses, youth mentors among others. The study aimed at achieving a contextualized understanding of the skills under investigation in the three countries- Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania.

This process required governments' approval in all three countries, recruitment of research personnel and training, provision of storybooks to the adolescents as gifts, logistical arrangements as well as adherence to the ministry of health guidelines on COVID-19. The ALiVE leaders and VaLi team worked hard and collaboratively and by end of the exercise, 368 interviews and 53 focus group discussions in 15 districts were conducted in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. What a milestone for uncertainty to achievement! During the period of data collection, the researchers took the responsibility of sensitizing the community about the dangers of COVID-19. They spared a few minutes of every conversation to share facts about the pandemic including precautionary measures. The team went ahead to provide water and soap to the participants, as much as possible they avoided handshakes and also kept social distance while conducting interviews. The process was marked with a few challenges, for instance, the Tanzania general election delayed the process and interfered with internet connection, researchers fatigue as a result of conducting long and numerous interviews in a day, religion, for example, our male researchers could not interact freely with female participants from Tana River and language barrier which was very evident during the transcription process.

A future full of optimism

ALiVE has ushered in an extreme ambition. Developing a simple, scalable, performance-task-based assessment almost sounds like a pipe dream. What inspires our confidence, is that we have the time and the resources needed, and we have the determination. Still, there are many of us, trying to succeed in this one thing. The hope of living in an Africa in which youth have the competences needed to thrive, will make us wake up each day. Until we achieve this.

#KawaidaMpya - Embracing the new normal

By Irene Chepngetich

The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic has shaken the entire world. No one has been spared across all strata of society. On 15th March, 2020, the Kenyan government abruptly closed schools and colleges nationwide disrupting learning for nearly 15 million children in primary and secondary schools. Children were expected to continue learning from home. Overnight, the parent became the teacher, with the expectation that parents would support the learning of their children. Many felt helpless as they did not know how to do this. They hoped that schools would re-open soon, but days turned into weeks, and weeks into months.

> "The coronavirus pandemic is one of the greatest struggles our country and the entire world has experienced. Education is among the most severely impacted sectors by COVID-19, so we must do something. The containment period is an opportunity for us to promote the learning of values as outlined in the Competency Based Curriculum. We are pleased to partner with various CSO's and religious bodies to run this campaign to encourage parents to create a routine that bolsters the acquisition of values such as responsibility, honesty, respect, love, unity, and integrity." Dr. David Njengere, Senior Advisor to the Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Education.
>
> "This is an opportunity to instill positive values such as integrity that is key in environmental protection. A sustainable environment means an abundance of food and stable livelihoods. During this containment period, I call upon everyone to show love by taking care of the environment and identifying any vulnerable groups of people that may need our support."
>
> **Wanjira Maathai,**
> Chairperson, Wangari Maathai Foundation Chair.

On April 6th 2020, Zizi Afrique convened a meeting of friends who had either extensive reach to the network of parents, or cared deeply about communication and reaching communities. Among those that came were the Ministry of Education, KICD, the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops, National Council of Churches of Kenya, Life Skills Promoters, PAL Network, Wangari Maathai Foundation, Lugha Ishara, Dignitas, Kukua, Paukwa, and. The idea of a national campaign was conceived and dubbed 'Let's Grow Together' with a hashtag #KawaidaMpya (NewNormal). The campaign would promote the learning of values by encouraging parents to create a daily routine for children and demonstrating empathy to needy families in their neighbourhoods.

"We cannot let the coronavirus pandemic stop our learning and growing as families," said Zizi Afrique Foundation, Executive Director, Dr. John Mugo. "We know that children are at home and it is important to keep them engaged. This containment period is an opportunity to learn through fun activities at home and grow together as a family, community, and nation". Through a series of meetings, the concept was made clear, and the Daily Routine campaign process drawn, presenting 7 steps through which each family could create a daily routine with their children.

> This is very educative even if it has a lot of jokes in it... but the okes are educating parents on how to support their children not to value phones so much
>
> **Jeff Jae**

On May 14th 2020, a successful online launch was held, attended by participants from government, learning institutions and civil society. By creating and following a daily routine, parents would nurture the value of responsibility and teach several life skills including self-management, self-esteem, collaboration and leadership.

The campaign targeted parents and learners using various social media platforms including Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp. To amplify the process and to enhance reachability, a well-renowned comedian by the name Erastus Ayieko Otieno, popularly known as Flaqo Raz Aka Mama Otis was engaged. With his creativity and hilarious clips, and through his ***Facebook*** account, the content on the creation of the daily routine has since attracted 766k views and shared 1.7k times. Jeff Jae commented: This is very educative even if it has a lot of jokes in it.... but the jokes are educating parents on how to support their children not to value phones so much.

The second phase of the campaign urged parents to engage in an ***empathy project*** as family. By identifying vulnerable members in their community and doing something about it, parents would nurture the values of empathy, love and kindness in children, and teach them life skills such as responsibility, decision making, leadership, collaboration, financial literacy and communication.

7 Steps in creating a family empathy project

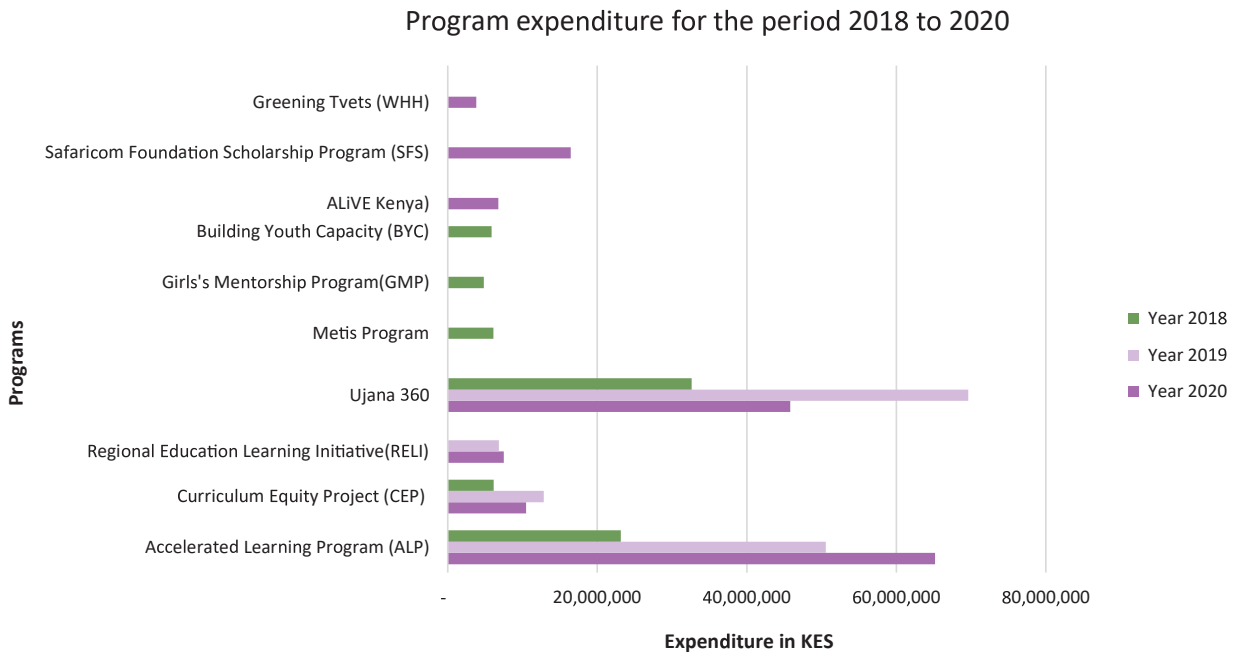
- Meet and discuss the effects of COVID-19 on your community
- Identify vulnerable groups of people that may need your support
- Evaluate the resources you have as a family and the support you can offer
- Single out one vulnerable group to offer the support to
- Mobilize the resources needed
- Provide the support as you obtain feedback
- Evaluate and share what you have learnt from the family project

The launch of the empathy campaign had more than 11.88 million impressions on Twitter and an approximate reach of 344,630 people. . Through #KawaidaMpya, we learnt that parental engagement and empowerment in the Competence Based Education could be reality, especially if this involved as many people as possible. Parents are concerned about their children, but most of them have little know-how and tools to animate their intervention. Through such campaigns, simple tools could stir action, and make homes spaces of play, learning and fun.

For the Financial Years 2018, 2019 & 2020

Description	31st Dec 2020		31st Dec 2019		December 2018	
	Amount	%	Amount	%	Amount	%
Current Assets						
Cash and Cash Equivalents	96,489,297	83.6%	81,257,956	79.0%	75,296,648	99.0%
Grant Receivable	785,658	0.7%	15,950,378	15.5%	-	0.0%
Other Receivables	14,206,213	12.3%	4,639,614	4.5%	139,718	0.2%
Sub total	111,481,168.00	96.6%	101,847,948.00	99.0%	75,436,366.00	99.2%
Fixed Assets						
Equipment	3,983,053	3.4%	1,038,387	1.0%	602,778	0.8%
Sub total	3,983,053.00	3.4%	1,038,387.00	1.0%	602,778.00	0.8%
Total Assets	**115,464,221**	**100.0%**	**102,886,335**	**100.0%**	**76,039,144**	**100.0%**
Liabilities and Accumulated Funds						
Current Liabilities						
Deferred income	71,385,709	61.8%	63,297,608	61.5%	42,463,827	55.8%
Payables	7,345,017	6.4%	6,013,410	5.8%	-	0.0%
Sub total	78,730,726.00	68.2%	69,311,018.00	67.4%	42,463,827.00	55.8%
Accumulated Funds						
General Fund	36,733,495	31.8%	33,575,317	32.6%	33,575,317	44.2%
Sub total	36,733,495.00	31.8%	33,575,317.00	32.6%	33,575,317.00	44.2%
Total Liabilities and Accumulated Funds	**115,464,221.00**	**100.0%**	**102,886,335.00**	**100.0%**	**76,039,144.00**	**100.0%**

Description	Dec 2020		Dec 2019		Dec 2018	
	Amount (KES)	%	Amount (KES)	%	Amount (KES)	%
B1. PROGRAM EXPENSES AND STAFF COSTS						
Accelerated Learning Program (ALP)	65,174,584	41.80%	50,574,529	35.52%	23,136,833	28.87%
Curriculum Equity Project (CEP)	10,474,169	6.72%	12,838,923	9.02%	6,146,949	7.67%
Regional Education Learning Initiative(RELI)	7,497,821	4.81%	6,845,127	4.81%	-	0.00%
Ujana 360	45,803,357	29.37%	69,605,929	48.89%	32,622,351	40.71%
Metis	-	0.00%	-	0.00%	6,117,101	7.63%
Girls' Mentorship Program(GMP)	-	0.00%	-	0.00%	4,819,010	6.01%
Building Youth Capacity (BYC)	-	0.00%	-	0.00%	5,879,689	7.34%
ALiVE	6,762,764	4.34%	-	0.00%	-	0.00%
Safaricom Foundation Scholarship Program (SFS)	16,447,418	10.55%	-	0.00%	-	0.00%
Greening TVET	3,831,379	2.46%	-	0.00%	-	0.00%
Sub total	**155,991,492**	**100.04%**	**139,864,508**		**78,721,933**	**98.24%**
B2. Amortization costs						
Depreciation and Amortisation Expense	1,350,581	0.87%	512,103	0.36%	248,622	0.31%
Finance Costs	(1,410,883)	-0.90%	2,008,512	1.41%	1,161,428	1.45%
Sub total	**(60,302)**	**-0.04%**	**2,520,615**	**1.77%**	**1,410,050**	**1.76%**
Total Expenditure	155,931,190	100%	142,385,123	100%	80,131,983	100.00%
C1. General Fund						
Balance b/f from previous period	33,575,317	91.40%	33,575,317	100.00%	-	0.00%
Current period general funds balance	3,158,178	8.60%	-	0.00%	33,575,317	100.00%
Total	**36,733,495**		**33,575,317**		**33,575,317**	


Program expenditure for the period 2018 to 2020
Greening Tvets (WHH)
Safaricom Foundation Scholarship Program (SFS)
ALiVE Kenya)
Building Youth Capacity (BYC)
Girls's Mentorship Program(GMP)
Metis Program
Ujana 360
Regional Education Learning Initiative(RELI)
Curriculum Equity Project (CEP)
Accelerated Learning Program (ALP)
Programs
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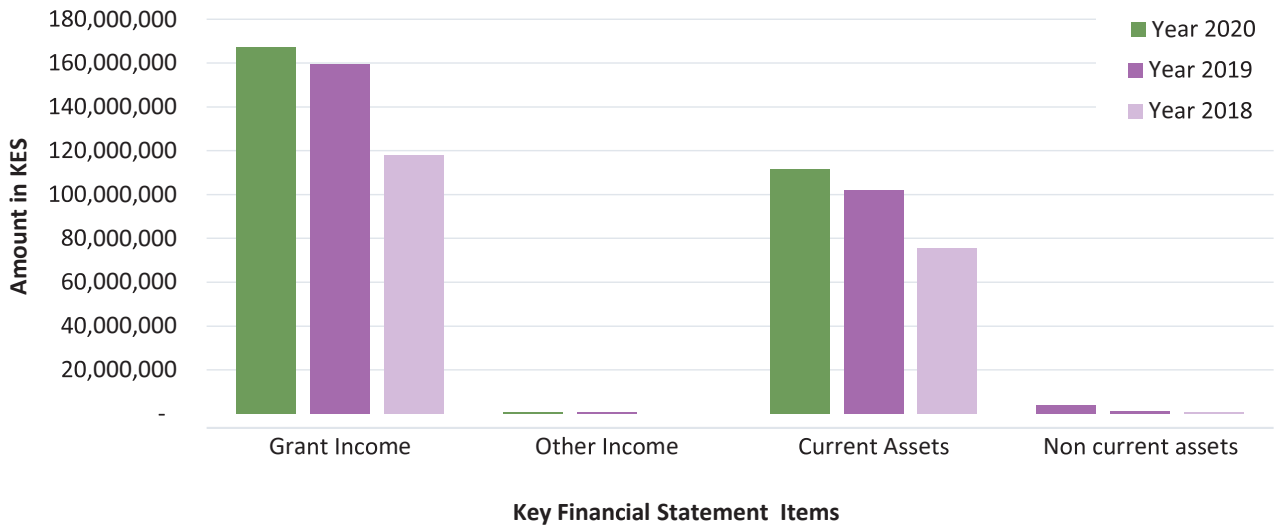
Expenditure in KES
Year 2018
Year 2019
Year 2020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Amount in KES
Grant Income
Other Income
Current Assets
Non current assets
Key Financial Statement Items
Year 2020
Year 2019
Year 2018

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